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LIVING STANDARDS OF THE URBAN POPULATION OF SOUTHERN BESSARABIA IN 1917

- Abstract -

The article examines the living standards of the population of Southern Bessarabian towns after the Revolution of February 1917, discloses the factors that negatively affected the financial position of the urban people, and measures that the local authorities introduced in order to resolve the crisis situation in the towns of the region. It was established that food, economic and financial crises caused a dramatic deterioration in the living standards of the urban population of Southern Bessarabia in 1917 and led to the crisis of the local self-government. On the basis of archival materials the author of the article has depicted the reaction of townspeople to the problems of shortages, rapid price increase and falling incomes of the population.

Keywords: urban population; living standards; First World War; the February Revolution; Southern Bessarabia.

Introduction

With the beginning of the First World War, the living standards of the urban population of the Russian Empire significantly deteriorated. Increasing prices, deficiency of essential goods and fuel, shortage of labor, the decline of many sectors of the economy and trade, loss of revenues in the city budget were the result of long-term maintenance of military operations and tsarist failure to reorient the economy to the military needs. The front-line position of the territory and the cessation of foreign trade links, which were an important source of income, also had a negative impact on the urban population of Bessarabia. In 1915-1916 the urban population already experienced financial and food crises. The policy of the Provisional

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Government, which came to power as a result of the February Revolution, did not stop the impoverishment of the urban population.

The Problem Statement

The author aims to highlight the changes in the living standards of the towns of Southern Bessarabia in 1917, to reveal the problems of the social and economic situation of the towns in the region, in particular the shortage of food products and high cost, as well as the attempts made by the local authorities to resolve them.

Research Analyses

The state of the urban population of Ukrainian lands during the First World War and the revolutionary events of 1917 are the subject of the study of many scholars, in particular O. Reient, O. Serdiuk¹, G. Turchenko², O. Vilshanska³, V. Molchanov⁴, O. Onishchenko⁵ and others. However, the problem of living standards of the urban population of Southern Bessarabia has remained outside the attention of historians. T. Kitanina⁶, V. Borisov, A. Chernobaiev⁷, A. Fedorov⁸, I.

¹ Reient, O., Serdiuk, O. (2004). *Persha svitova viina i Ukraina. [The First World War and Ukraine]*. Kyiv: Geneza.

² Turchenko, G. (2014). Sotsialno-ekonomichni protsesy v pivdennoukrainskomu rehioni. [Social and economic processes in the Southern Ukrainian region]. *Velyka viina 1914-1918 rr. i Ukraina [The Great War 1914-1918 and Ukraine]*, vol. 1, Kyiv: TOV "Vydavnytstvo "KLIIO"". P. 408-432.

³ Vilshanska, O. (2004). Povsiakdenne zhyttia naseleння Ukrainy pid chas Pershoi svitovoi viiny. [The everyday life of Ukrainian population during the First World War]. *Ukrainian Historical Journal*. (4). P. 56-70.

⁴ Molchanov, V. (2014). Vplyv Pershoi svitovoi viiny na zhyttievyi riven naseleння Ukrainy. [Influence of the First World War in Ukraine standard of living]. *Problems of the history of Ukraine of the 19th - beginning of the 20th centuries*. (23). P. 92-102.

⁵ Onishchenko, O. (2014). Zahostrennia ekonomichnykh problem u mistakh Ukrainy u 1917 r. [Worsening of economic problems in cities in Ukraine 1917]. *History of trade, taxes and duties*. (1). P. 41-46.

⁶ Kitanina, T. (1985). *Vojna, hleb i revoljucija. (Prodovol'stvennyj vopros v Rossii. 1914 - oktjabr' 1917 g.)*. [War, bread and revolution (The food issue in Russia. 1914 – October 1917)]. Leningrad: Nauka.

⁷ Borisov, V., Chernobaiev, A. (1997). *Hleb, vojna, revoljucija: Prodovol'stvennaja politika na JUge Rossii v period pervoj mirovoj vojny i revoljucii (1914-1918)*. [Bread, War, Revolution: Food Policy in the South of Russia during the First World War and the Revolution (1914-1918)]. Moscow: AIA, Lugansk: LSHI.

⁸ Fedorov, A. (2010). Organizacija prodovol'stvennogo dela v revoljucionnoj Rossii (mart-oktjabr' 1917 g.). [Organization of the food activity in revolutionary Russia (March – October 1917)]. *Proceedings of the higher educational institutions. Volga region. Humanitarian sciences*. (2). P. 19-27.

Sakhnevich⁹ and I. Shpektorenko¹⁰ were engaged in the study of the food problem in 1917 and its influence on the living standards of the population. Some aspects of the state of the towns of Southern Bessarabia in the years of the First World War were studied by L. Tsyganenko¹¹, V. Drozdov¹² and I. Tatarinov¹³.

Statement of the basic material

A serious problem that negatively affected the state of the urban population of Southern Bessarabia was the food crisis. The attempts made by the central and local authorities to solve the food problem and stop the rapid price increase in 1914-1916 were not successful. At the end of 1916 and at the beginning of 1917 there were food shortages in all the towns of Bessarabia Province. The Governor who carried out the duties of the Authorized Chairman of the Special Food Council was central to the organization of supplying the population of the region with food. In the towns there were special bodies involved in organizing the purchase and supply of the necessary goods, determining the monthly rate of the population needs in essentials. However, the joint actions of central and local authorities could not overcome the problem of food shortages. Particularly acute was the problem of shortage of sugar, the stocks of which in the second half of 1916 in many towns did not suffice¹⁴.

⁹ Sakhnevich, I. (2014). Pravovye osnovy prodovol'stvennoj politiki Vremennogo pravitel'stva. [Legal basis for the food policy of the Provisional Government]. *Legal notes*. (1). P. 138-143.

¹⁰ Shpektorenko, I. (1998). Z istorii prodovol'choi polityky Tymchasovoho uriadu v Ukraini (1917 r.) (na materialakh Katerynoslavskoi hubernii). [Concerning the history of the food administering by the Provisional government in Ukraine (1917) (based on the materials of Katerynoslavs'ka hubernia)]. *Southern Ukraine*. (1). P. 120-127.

¹¹ Tsyganenko, L. (2016). Nevidomi storinky z istorii vyboriv Izmail'skoho miskoho holovy v 1917 r. (za materialamy rehionalnoho arkhivu). [Unknown pages of the history of the election of Izmail Mayor in 1917 (based on the materials of the regional archives)]. *Problems of the formation of Ukrainian statehood: Collection of scientific works on the materials of the scientific and practical conference with international participation (to the 25th anniversary of Ukraine's Independence)*. Izmail: RVV IDGU. P. 141-147.

¹² Drozdov, V. (2016). Defitsyt spozhyvchykh tovariv u mistakh Pivdennoi Bessarabii v roky Pershoi svitovoi viiny. [Deficiency of consumer goods in the cities of Southern Bessarabia during the First World War]. *Scientific Bulletin of the Izmail State University of Humanities*. (34). P. 60-65.

¹³ Tatarinov, I. (2017). "Sukhyi zakon" v Bessarabii chasiv tymchasovoho uriadu. [The "dry law" in Bessarabia of the Provisional Government]. *Theoretical, methodological and practical problems of history, philosophy, sociology, political science, jurisprudence*. Ізмаїл: RVV IDGU. P. 134-138.

¹⁴ Drozdov, V. (2016). Defitsyt spozhyvchykh tovariv u mistakh Pivdennoi Bessarabii v roky Pershoi svitovoi viiny. [Deficiency of consumer goods in the cities of Southern Bessarabia

There was also a lack of wheat and flour. The prohibition by the imperial government to sell meat and meat products by the law of June 30, 1916, as well as the introduction of grain extraction by the decision of the Minister of Agriculture O. Rittikh of November 29, 1916 only deepened the food crisis. According to O. Reient and O. Serdiuk, in early 1917 trade stocks in all regions of Ukraine dropped dramatically¹⁵.

After the February Revolution, the Provisional Government introduced a number of measures to resolve the food situation. A National Food Committee was established, and on March 25, 1917, the "Provisional Regulations of Local Food Bodies" was adopted, which established provincial, county, municipal, district and rural food committees. Provincial food committees enjoyed extensive rights and exercised general food management in the province, served the Minister of Agriculture for the needs of the army and the population, provided information about the food situation, promoted the organization of agricultural production and organized the provision of the population with essential goods¹⁶. The specificity of the food bodies of Bessarabia was their militarization, since they consisted of representatives of the Romanian and Southwestern fronts that led them to be more subordinate to the military command than to the Ministry of Food¹⁷.

The analysis of the minutes of the municipal council meetings suggests that the work of the food committees was ineffective. In March 1917, the Akkerman Municipal Duma considered the work of the food committee insufficient and decided to reorganize it¹⁸. At the meeting of the Izmil Community Council of July 13, 1917, they considered the petition of the townspeople on the need to re-elect the members of the Municipal Food Council because of their inaction and incompetence. "Since the day of the Food Board functioning, no reduction of the town's urgent needs has been noticed, but on the contrary, the town's needs have

during the First World War]. *Scientific Bulletin of the Izmil State University of Humanities*. (34), P. 63.

¹⁵ Reient, O., Serdiuk, O. (2004). *Persha svitova viina i Ukraina. [The First World War and Ukraine]*. Kyiv: Geneza, P. 364.

¹⁶ Gyns, G., comp. (1917). *Uzakonenija i rasporjaženija po prodovol'stvennomu delu za 1914-1917 gg. [Legislation and orders for the food business for the years of 1914-1917]*. vol. 1. Petersburg: Izdanie ministerstva prodovol'stvija. P. 38-39.

¹⁷ Borisov, V., Chernobaiev, A. (1997). *Hleb, vojna, revoljucija: Prodovol'stvennaja politika na JUge Rossii v period pervoj mirovoj vojny i revoljucii (1914-1918)*. [Bread, War, Revolution: Food Policy in the South of Russia during the First World War and the Revolution (1914-1918)]. Moscow: AIA, Lugansk: LSHI. P. 54.

¹⁸ The National Archives of the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter – NARM), f. 9, inv. 1, c. 5121, P. 58.

been aggravated,” was stated in the petition – “Therefore, in order to prevent serious disturbances in connection with the lack of essential goods, we ask for the speedy fulfillment of our request”¹⁹.

One of the important measures of the Provisional Government was the introduction of the state grain monopoly on March 25, 1917, according to which the grain harvest of past years and the future harvest of 1917, except for the amount needed for food and household needs of owners, entered into the disposal of the state and could be alienated by state food bodies at fixed prices²⁰. There was also a monopoly on sugar, matches, tobacco and other goods. In addition, regulations were made on the standardization of consumption and supply of foodstuffs, the establishment of firm essential goods prices, requisitioning and the prohibition of the export of food products from the places of their production, etc.

On August 27, 1917, by the decision of the Provisional Government, firm bread prices were doubled, which led to an aggravation of the food problem, contributed to the increase in inflation and the overall cost of living. Another consequence of rise in bread prices was the growth of speculation. Every day, the Izmil-Bolgrad District Food Board reported that in the towns private individuals sold and purchased a great quantity of wheat delivered by the peasants. “Wheat is bought at prices higher than firm prices, is hidden in mills, where it is milled to flour. All this leads to the fact that peasants evade to supply Government counteragents with wheat at firm prices, since they have the ability to sell it secretly at high prices. Meanwhile, the urban population is threatened with hunger and the consequences of it can be terrible”, – it was mentioned in the letter of the Izmil-Bolgrad District Food Board to the Chief of the Police of Vilkovo on September 2, 1917²¹.

The food policy of the Provisional Government did not achieve its goals and did not solve the food problem. The problems in the army food supply negatively affected the state of the population, especially on the front-line territories. For example, the mandatory decision of the Provincial Food Committee of August 11, 1917 in Bessarabia Province was to prohibit a slaughter of cattle for the needs of the population and for all rear establishments, as well as the sale and purchase of meat

¹⁹ NARM, f. 9, inv. 1, c. 5037, P. 114.

²⁰ Sakhnevich, I. (2014). Pravovye osnovy prodovol'stvennoj politiki Vremennogo pravitel'stva. [Legal basis for the food policy of the Provisional Government]. *Legal notes*. (1), P. 140.

²¹ Municipal Institution “The Izmil Archives” (hereinafter - MIIA), f. 4, inv. 1, c. 551, P. 70.

of these cattle for cooking²². Also, on September 15, 1917, the census of grain stocks (rye, wheat, emmer wheat, millet, buckwheat, lentils, peas, beans, corn, barley, oat, flour, bran, cereal, grain waste, cattle cake) began and all the grain entered into the disposal of the state at firm prices, except for a certain amount that remained to the owner to feed the family, the workers, the cattle and for the crops. Upon request of the local census authority every owner was to announce the amount and storage location of the bread stocks he had, as well as the number of persons, livestock and tithes of land. Local food authorities were responsible for verifying this information. In the case of hidden bread stocks, they were alienated at half price²³.

Another consequence of the food crisis was a violation of the exchange of goods among the urban and rural people. In an appeal of the chairman of the Izmail-Bolgrad District Food Board I. F. Fitov to the grain growers of October 20, 1917, about the necessity of surrendering grain balances to provide the army and the urban population with bread, it was indicated that the peasants refused to provide the towns with bread because they did not provide peasants with manufactory and other things. "Because of the high cost of all items and the lack of bread, the urban people are in worse conditions than the rural ones, because they are forced to buy everything edible, and do not have anything inedible ... – it was pointed out in the appeal. – Hunger riots, which may arise in towns as a result of the refusal of the village people to give bread, ruin the homeland"²⁴.

The issue of supplying Danube towns with bread was considered at the meeting of the Izmail-Bolgrad District Food Board on November 4, 1917. In the report of the chairman I. F. Fitov it was said that the peasants did not hand over the surplus of grain, despite the repeated appeals and demands of the board, and the urban population in the near future would face the problem of hunger. "Up to now, only Izmail is in a relatively safe condition, – he said. – The towns of Bolgrad, Reni, Kiliia and the suburb of Vilkovo are completely unsecured"²⁵. Because of this, the board was forced to run to the requisition of wheat and rye from peasants. The serious problem that hindered the supply of towns with bread was the illegal sale of grain to speculators by peasants. In addition, even the local food boards of Kiliia and Reni, without the permission of the district administration, rushed to buy wheat from the peasants at inflated prices. The main reason for such unlawful actions was the

²² MIIA, f. 4, inv. 1, c. 551, P. 45.

²³ Ibid. P. 79.

²⁴ MIIA, f. 292, inv. 1, c. 228, P. 424.

²⁵ MIIA, f. 4, inv. 1, c. 551, P. 95.

inactivity of rural food boards and town police. In particular, I. F. Fitov pointed out that in Kiliia, Reni and Bolgrad, white bread from smuggled wheat was sold everywhere. According to the results of the report, it was decided to establish special requisition commissions to collect grain balances from the peasants, as well as take decisive measures to combat grain smuggling and speculation. Urban food boards were recommended to bake bread from a mixture of 45% wheat flour, 45% rye and 10% corn to save wheat, as well as to enter the card system for the sale of bread, releasing 1.5 pounds per day for a single person and 2 pounds for workers. It was also proposed to keep stock records of grain among urban and suburban people, leaving every homeowner the stock of wheat and rye which is only necessary for the living of the family before the new harvest and to exclude such persons from bread soldering²⁶.

In addition to the food crisis, the problem with fuel was quite acute. The mandatory decree of the 6th Army Commander of September 3, 1917 prohibited deforestation in all local forest areas and the export of cut wood from an area bounded by the Danube River, the Prut River and the line from the village of Sancha to the village of Kogylnyk and further along the Kogylnyk river until its fall into Lake Kunduk²⁷. The entire cut wood was transferred to the Army Operational Commission, which was to divide it between the population and the army.

The financial position of Southern Bessarabia towns deteriorated significantly as a result of the rapid rise in prices. According to official data, the purchasing power of the ruble as of March 1, 1917 decreased by almost 4 times compared with the prewar year²⁸. A striking example of the sharp rise in the prices of essential goods is the comparison of average reference prices in Akkerman in May-June 1917 (see Table 1) based on the data from the Bessarabian County Provincial Government²⁹. Within one month, prices for cereals, flour and potatoes increased significantly, prices for sugar, tea, lard and soap increased slightly. Meat prices remained unchanged and salt prices declined.

²⁶ MIIA, f. 4, inv. 1, c. 551, P. 96.

²⁷ Ibid. P. 72.

²⁸ Reient, O., Serdiuk, O. (2004). *Persha svitova viina i Ukraina. [The First World War and Ukraine]*. Kyiv: Geneza. P. 371.

²⁹ NARM, f. 6, inv. 1, c. 954, P. 28-34.

Table 1

Average Prices of Essential Products in Akkerman in May-June 1917

Name of the product	May 1917		June 1917		Percentage of increase
	rubles	copecks	rubles	copecks	
Wheat flour, pood	3	35	4	50	34
Corn flour, pood	1	60	3	50	119
Wheat, pood	1	85	2	90	57
Corn, pood	1	20	1	80	50
Oat, pood	1	80	2	45	36
Barley, pood	1	30	2	05	58
Wheat groats, pood	6	00	8	00	33
Sugar, pood	11	60	11	80	2
Tea, pound	2	40	2	70	13
Salt, pood	2	40	1	60	-50
Soap, pood	28	00	30	00	7
Lard, pood	28	00	30	00	7
Meat, pood	18	00	18	00	0
Potatoes, pood	2	40	3	50	46

High prices mostly affected those categories of the urban population, the only source of which was the salary, in particular officials, workers of medical institutions and teachers. They repeatedly asked to raise salaries as a result of price increase. Thus, members of the Akkerman County Administrative Board in 1915 calculated that to provide the minimum needs of one person, 55 rubles per month was necessary. At that time, prices in comparison with 1914 increased 1.5-2 times, and the average salary of the employee was about 50 rubles a month. At the same time, 44 people from 84 members of the board had salaries of less than 40 rubles a month. During 1916 salaries were raised twice: the first time – by 15-30%, the second – by 25-65%. However, some essential goods prices increased to 500%³⁰. In the submission of the staff members of the Office to the mayor of Akkerman, which was considered at the meeting of the Municipal Duma of March 21, 1917, the difficult economic condition in which they occurred was reported: “Many of us have to live from hand to mouth. This is about food; as for clothing and footwear, they are worn out and we can’t even think of buying them. The time will come when having

³⁰ MIIA, f. 47, inv. 1, c. 430, P. 5.

no shoes or other necessary clothing, we will not be able to come to work. Such a difficult economic condition is adversely reflected on our spiritual mood, because the idea of the daily bread and other needs gives no peace to us”³¹.

On April 29, 1917, the officials of all departments of the Akkerman County Council, the Administration Board and the workers of the Small Loan Cash Department, gathered at a general meeting in order to apply to an extraordinary County Council Assembly for the permission to issue an allowance to pay in the amount from 50 to 200%. As a result, since May 1, 1917, the size of the additional salary of workers was set according to the size of the salaries of the staff: the maximum amount of the allowance (200%) was intended for persons who received an annual salary of not more than 25 rubles, and for those who received a higher salary, the size of the premium gradually decreased to 50%³². However, such measures did not help to improve the position of officials. Due to the increase of firm bread prices on August 27, prices of other products increased about 3-10 times. The petition of the Akkerman County Board of November 9, 1917, concerning the increase in salaries, indicated that the extraordinary high cost was hardly reflected on the financial position of those workers who had a family and received a small salary. In particular, with the approach of the winter, expenditures on the purchase of firewood increased, the price of which increased by 330% in comparison with the last year³³.

In another petition of the officials of the Akkerman Administrative Board, the Small Loan Cash Department and other institutions, they complained about a significant deterioration in the property status of officials, who, due to a fixed salary, were most affected by the high cost. “Essential product prices are incredibly rising with every week, the document said. – At present time in order to make ends meet, the officials are forced to restrict themselves in everything”³⁴. In the comparative table of essential product prices attached to the petition (*see Table 2*), it was noted that the prices as of October 10, 1917 compared with the prices of 1914 increased minimum by 275%, maximum by 1900%, and on average – by 1150%.

³¹ NARM, f. 9, inv. 1, c. 5121, P. 35.

³² MIIA, f. 47, inv. 1, c. 430, P. 10-13.

³³ Ibid. P. 1.

³⁴ Ibid. P. 2.

Table 2
Comparative Table of Essential Product Prices
(as of October 10, 1917)

Name of the product	At the beginning of the war		Nowadays		Percentage of increase
	rubles	copecks	rubles	copecks	
Bread baked, pound	–	05	–	22	450
Flour of middling quality, pood	1	50	9	50	533
Sunflower oil, pound	–	18	2	80	1450
Butter, pound	–	25	4	–	1500
Mutton, pound	–	07	–	90	1040
Potatoes, pood	–	35	6	–	1600
Milk, quart	–	10	–	80	700
Eggs, a dozen	–	20	2	–	900
Fish, pound	–	10	1	50	1400
Kerosene, quart	–	15	–	55	275
Soap, pound	–	12	2	–	1533
Coal, pood	–	50	6	50	1200
Footwear	8	–	110	–	1280
Rubbers	2	50	20	–	700
Printed cotton, arshin	–	15	2	–	1233
Tights	3	–	40	–	1233
Cloth	4	–	70	–	1650
Water, barrel	–	25	5	–	1900
Firewood, pood	–	10	1	50	1500

At the same time, the officials of the Akkerman County Council for the whole period of the war received the following high cost allowances: the salary of 30 rubles – 185%, 60 rubles – 120%, 200 rubles – 60%³⁵. At the same time, as a result of rising bread prices, workers' wages increased. This led to the fact that a shoemaker or a tailor was paid more than a boardman. The petition noted that if the salary is not raised, the officials' escape will have a systemic character.

The same situation was observed in Izmail. At the beginning of 1917, the officials of the Izmail Municipal Administrative Board received an allowance in an

³⁵ MIIA, f. 47, inv. 1, c. 430, P. 2.

amount of 35-70%, and the employees of a municipal hospital received an allowance in an amount of 10-35% depending on the salary³⁶. The increase in salaries did not improve the situation due to the dramatic rise in prices. In May 1917, at the meeting of the Izmail Municipal Council, several requests were made to raise wages in connection with the high cost. In particular, the doctor of the municipal hospital asked for an increase in pay, stating that the hospital workers due to low wages are dismissed or are planning to retire³⁷. The employees of the administrative board, the water station and the power plant, the office clerks of the municipal care, and others like that appealed with similar statements. As a result, some salaries were raised, but part of the petitions were rejected. An interesting fact is that even the secretary of the Izmail Municipal Council K. M. Alexandrov turned in a resignation because of the low salary. Due to the lack of candidates, he was asked to remain in the post, his salary being increased to 200 rubles³⁸. In July 1917, a special commission was formed by the Community Council to review the salaries for municipal employees and to prepare a draft document for their fair increase³⁹. This document having been discussed, it was decided to establish new salaries for 36 posts since October 1, 1917. Some of the salaries were doubled. For example, the salary of the secretary of the Municipal Council increased to 400 rubles⁴⁰. Also, since September 1, 1917, salaries for public school teachers increased.

It should be noted that the municipal authorities sometimes did not even have the funds to pay salaries to municipal officials. In April 1917, at the meeting of the Izmail Community Council the question of how to replenish the city budget in connection with the absence of funds was considered. Among the funds raised, even 13.000 rubles were temporarily used, which had come from the sale of matches owned by the Serbian government and had been requisitioned in Izmail⁴¹. In June 1917, the Izmail Community Council also decided to receive a short-term loan of 10 thousand rubles at a local credit institution to pay staff salaries⁴².

Despite the extremely difficult financial position of the population, the local authorities were forced to make decisions on increasing taxes and fees due to the lack of budget revenues, as well as on collecting arrears. Considering the issue of finding additional funds for spending at the July meeting, the Izmail Community

³⁶ NARM, f. 9, inv. 1, c. 5037, P. 9.

³⁷ Ibid. P. 53.

³⁸ Ibid. P. 57.

³⁹ NARM, f. 9, inv. 1, c. 5037, P. 122.

⁴⁰ MIIA, f. 2, inv. 1, c. 707, P. 15-16.

⁴¹ NARM, f. 9, inv. 1, c. 5037, P. 129-133.

⁴² Ibid. P. 97-98.

Council decided to invite the townspeople to pay the town fees in advance by the end of the year, as well as to intensify collection measures. One of the measures was to set a 7-day deadline for payment of arrears, and in case of non-payment, to sell the debtor's property. At the same time, the secretary of the Municipal Council reported that the measures to collect arrears did not produce significant results, since one part of the debtors was located outside the town and the other was not able to pay them due to the difficult financial situation⁴³. At the same meeting, fees for the use of water from the municipal water system and for the use of electricity were doubled. In September and October of 1917, the Municipal Council of Izmail made changes to the municipal budget, increasing the fees from restaurants, billiards and bakeries (the total tax amounted to 540 rubles instead of the previously established 270 rubles), factories, plants and mills (1495 rubles instead of 675 rubles), carrier's trade (1600 rubles instead of 602 rubles), horses of private individuals (360 rubles instead of 36 rubles), cars, motorcycles and bicycles (300 rubles instead of 99 rubles). There was also double duty on using scales and a duty on using trade places increased fivefold⁴⁴.

The deterioration of living standards prompted the urban population to violate the law, in particular to unauthorized occupation of urban arable land. The cases of unauthorized occupation of land by residents of Izmail and the suburbs were reported back in 1916. This area was about 55 dessiatines (a dessiatine is a land measure equivalent to 2.7 acres)⁴⁵. In 1917, residents of the suburbs of Izmail, with the permission of the municipal council, distributed the municipal arable land with an area of 1 626 dessiatines among each other for annual use on the lease rights through their Suburban Rural Committee for a fee of 7 rubles and 50 copecks per dessiatine⁴⁶. The funds received in an amount of more than 12 thousand rubles the Committee had to convey to the Municipal Administrative Board, but, despite the commitment, it refused to return them. At the same time, the representatives of the Committee decided to separate the suburbs from the town of Izmail and become self-governing units. In October 1917, they declared to the Municipal Administrative Board of Izmail that the land belonged to the suburbs, but they did not intend to pay for it⁴⁷. The lack of these revenues, which were the main source of income, hit the municipal budget dramatically.

⁴³ Ibid. P. 111-113.

⁴⁴ MIIA, f. 2, inv. 1, c. 707, P. 10-15.

⁴⁵ MIIA, f. 2, inv. 1, c. 696, P. 175-176.

⁴⁶ MIIA, f. 2, inv. 1, c. 706, P. 35.

⁴⁷ MIIA, f. 2, inv. 1, c. 724, P. 68.

At the end of October, the Izmail Municipal Council again considered changes to the budget with the purpose to introduce new taxes. The need for their introduction was due to the critical state of municipal finances. The acting head of the Mayor E. K. Lashkov pointed out that taxes to the municipal treasury almost did not come due to the unauthorized occupation of the municipal arable land by residents of the suburbs. The only solution, in his opinion, was the introduction of new taxes on some goods, despite the fact that it would contribute to increasing prices on them, which were already too high. Against their introduction was the chairman of the Municipal Council I. G. Adler, who spoke for the forced collection of municipal duties from the residents of the suburbs and for the petition to get a loan in lending institutions. As a result, the Municipal Council decided to introduce new taxes and at the same time apply to the government with a request to give the town a loan in an amount of 100 thousand rubles⁴⁸.

The critical conditions, which the towns were in, led to the crisis of the local self-government. On March 28, 1917 the Mayor of Akkerman G. A. Spilioti resigned. In addition to him, some members of the Municipal Duma also stepped down from the post⁴⁹. In Izmail at the beginning of April 1917 Mayor D. F. Tulchianov resigned, and newly elected Mayor I. F. Fitov immediately abandoned his post⁵⁰. Acting Mayor I. S. Dromashkov in the telegram to the District Commissioner of Izmail District of June 20, 1917 described the state of municipal finances as follows: "There is no money in the local treasury. There is nothing to satisfy the urgent expenditures (maintenance of the hospital, guardianship, fire brigade, salaries of teachers and officials of the administrative board, water supply, power plants and other enterprises). There are no revenues to the treasury"⁵¹. In September 1917, E. K. Lashkov was elected as the acting mayor, who, in one of his appeals to the provincial commissioner wrote: "The municipal economy is taken in a destroyed form, the treasury is empty, and there is a great deal of debts around. Some branches of the economy naturally have to die"⁵².

⁴⁸ MIIA, f. 2, inv. 1, c. 707, P. 21.

⁴⁹ NARM, f. 9, inv.1, c. 5121, P. 56-57.

⁵⁰ Tsyganenko, L. (2016). Nevidomi storinky z istorii vyboriv Izmail'skoho miskoho holovy v 1917 r. (za materialamy rehionalnoho arkhivu). [Unknown pages of the history of the election of Izmail Mayor in 1917 (based on the materials of the regional archives)]. *Problems of the formation of Ukrainian statehood: Collection of scientific works on the materials of the scientific and practical conference with international participation (to the 25th anniversary of Ukraine's Independence)*. Izmail: RVV IDGU. P. 143-145.

⁵¹ MIIA, f. 2, inv. 1, c. 728, P. 18.

⁵² MIIA, f. 2, inv. 1, c. 724, P. 68.

The sanitary condition of the cities was also inadequate. In particular, the chairman of the Izmail Community Council I.G. Adler announced at the meeting the need for emergency measures to clean the town. Due to the deployment of troops in the city, many yards were abandoned and some houses were converted into stables. All this threatened with the spread of infectious diseases. In addition, there was virtually no medical staff in the city: there was only one municipal doctor, who was in charge of the municipal hospital and was performing the duties of a sanitary inspector⁵³.

The town of Reni was even in a more critical position. In the three years of the war, this town, being in close proximity to the theater of warfare and being repeatedly subjected to artillery fire, was in serious economic and food crises. As a result of the inactivity, Mayor I. P. Gaitani was dismissed. The catastrophic state of the city economy was reported in the petition of the Reni Municipal Administrative Board to the provincial commissioner of June 17, 1917: "All fences in the town are destroyed for using them as firewood, the wooden parts of the buildings in the city are destroyed and taken for burning, and extremely numerous private houses and city barns are destroyed and brought to naught. Besides, the municipal land and the land of townspeople are either interrupted by trenches, or serve as military bivouacs, or else they are occupied with artillery batteries or grazing livestock..."⁵⁴. In conditions of excessive high cost, the paying capacity of the population was extremely low, and funds of the local treasury were almost non-existent.

Conclusions. The dramatic decline in the living standards of the urban population of Southern Bessarabia was due to the increased food crisis, price escalation of essential goods, and the lack of sufficient funds in municipal budgets to resolve the difficult economic situation. Municipal authorities, despite the attempts to solve the problems of shortage of goods and high prices, could not improve the living conditions of the urban population. Under these circumstances, the municipal economy came into decline, part of the workers were forced to retire in search of a better luck, speculation, smuggling and other illegal actions were developed.

⁵³ NARM, f. 9, inv. 1, c. 5037, P. 130.

⁵⁴ NARM, f. 9, inv. 1, c. 4332, P. 151.

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